

Historical collections continue to support faunistic research: the first record of *Saptha divitiosa* (Lepidoptera, Choreutidae) from the Nicobar Islands, India

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Abstract

Based on a specimen collected in the mid-19th century, the first documented record of *Saptha divitiosa* from the Nicobar Islands is given. This record extends and reshapes the known western limit of this species' distribution range. Image of the specimen, as well as brief considerations on the known distribution of this species are provided. The specimen also holds a certain historical value, being collected during the first "Galathea" expedition (1845–1847).

Keywords

faunistic note, new record, distribution.

The "Grigore Antipa" National Museum of Natural History is well known as a depository of many important collections of butterflies and moths comprising specimens collected mainly from the Central and south-eastern Europe, chiefly from the present territory of Romania. However, some of these collections are also rich in material from other regions, especially the Far East and the Americas.

During recent decades, constant efforts have been made to improve the knowledge on the material from relatively poorly studied groups, previously superficially catalogued and/or for series collected in remote, little-known geographical areas.

This way, it was hoped not only the knowledge on the systematic diversity of several insufficiently studied collections would become available, but also to increase the extent to which the “Grigore Antipa” museum’s collections might support documenting the fauna from remote geographical areas where faunal studies are still in their beginnings. As one result, a close examination of specimens found in roughly sorted and catalogued batches of micromoths from prince Aristide Caradja’s Lepidoptera collection have led to the identification of a species previously not reported from the Nicobar Islands.

Material examined

Saptha divitiosa Walker, 1864. 1 ♂ (Fig. 1), INDIA, the Nicobar Islands. The blue collecting label found on the pin of the specimen also has the mention “Galathea” (Fig. 2), which indicates that the specimen was collected during the first Danish expedition on the corvette HDMS Galathea (1845–1847). This expedition visited the Nicobar Islands during January and February 1846 bringing many valuable specimens back to Copenhagen on its return. Probably long after it was captured, this specimen was correctly identified, since it also holds on its pin a label with the mention “Chor.[eutis] nobilis F. & R.”, a reference to *Badera nobilis* Felder and Rogenhofer, 1875, a junior synonym of *Saptha divitiosa* described from a specimen captured in Ambon almost a decade later, during the expedition on SMS Novara (1857–1859) (Felder et al. 1875).



Figure 1. *Saptha divitiosa*, male, the Nicobar Islands; specimen in Aristide Caradja’s collection, the “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History.



Figure 2. *Saptha divitiosa*, male, the Nicobar Islands – specimen labels.

ccongeneric *Saptha beryllitis* (Meyrick, 1910) based on a single specimen collected on this archipelago (Meyrick 1910), currently in the Edward Meyrick's collection, BMNH. Nevertheless, studies should be undertaken to check whether the population of this species still exists in the Nicobar Islands and also to increase the knowledge of the biology of this species.

The specimen of *Saptha divitiosa* presented in this paper has also a historical value, since it was collected during the first Danish Galathea expedition (1845–1847). Among the materials brought by the expedition at its return to Denmark were 93 containers of "zoological, entomological, botanical and geological objects". The intention of the King Christian VIII of Denmark, the one who had taken action on the organisation of this expedition, was to later sponsor the publication of the scientific results of the expedition. However, at that time there were no lepidopterists in the Zoological Museum from Copenhagen. Moreover, the King died of sepsis on January 20, 1848 and soon after his country was thrown into the Three Years' War (1848–1852). Most of the boxes with the collected items remained unopened and, with some exceptions, were never properly processed. Many of the specimens collected during the first "Galathea" expedition subsequently served mainly as reference material. However, on few occasions, some of these specimens were entrusted for study to different specialists, among them the Danish entomologist Wilhelm von Hedemann

(1836–1903). After von Hedemann's death, Hans Larsen, his personal servant, sold his collection of microlepidoptera to prince Aristide Caradja, who incorporated it in his own collection. Later on, prince Aristide Caradja sold his collection at the end of World War II to the “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History, which explains how several specimens collected during the first “Galathea” expedition are now in the possession of the museum in Bucharest.

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